

**Proposed Substitute  
Bill No. 5347**

LCO No. 2801

**AN ACT IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE TO VETERANS BY THE  
ADVOCACY AND ASSISTANCE UNIT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS BASED ON A PROGRAM REVIEW AND  
INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE STUDY.**

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1       Section 1. Subsections (b) and (c) of section 27-102*l* of the 2016  
2       supplement to the general statutes are repealed and the following is  
3       substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2016*):

4       (b) (1) The commissioner may appoint a unit head to administer a  
5       veterans' advocacy and assistance unit for the aid and benefit of  
6       veterans [, and their spouses, [and] eligible dependents and family  
7       members. [Such unit shall conduct an annual training course for any  
8       city or town employee designated a veterans' service contact person  
9       pursuant to subsection (b) of section 27-135.] The unit shall have a staff  
10      of not less than eight men and women, including six service officers,  
11      and clerical personnel. The unit head and the service officers shall be  
12      veterans, as defined in section 27-103, or veterans who were awarded  
13      the armed forces expeditionary medal for service by the armed forces.  
14      At least one of the service officers shall be a woman having a  
15      demonstrated interest in the concerns of women veterans, who shall be  
16      responsible for addressing those concerns, and, effective upon the next  
17      opening of a service officer position occurring on or after July 1, 2010,

18 at least two of the service officers shall be individuals having bilingual  
19 proficiency in English and Spanish, within existing authorized  
20 positions. Each service officer shall successfully complete a course in  
21 veterans' benefits within one year of commencement of employment  
22 and shall be assigned to one of the five congressional districts of the  
23 state.

24 (2) The unit staff shall, at least twice annually, conduct a training  
25 course for any city or town employee designated a veterans' service  
26 contact person pursuant to subsection (b) of section 27-135, as  
27 amended by this act. The unit staff shall include in such training  
28 course a summary of state and federal services and benefits, the duties  
29 to be carried out by each veterans' service contact person, as described  
30 in subsection (a) of section 27-135, as amended by this act, and any  
31 assistance the unit staff may provide to any veterans' service contact  
32 person related to such duties.

33 (3) (A) The veterans' advocacy and assistance unit shall develop a  
34 written outreach plan identifying (i) strategies for conducting outreach  
35 to veterans and their spouses, eligible dependents and family members  
36 for purposes of providing assistance in claims for veterans' services or  
37 benefits, and (ii) to the extent possible, specific events and other  
38 opportunities to provide such assistance that are sponsored by the unit  
39 or in which the unit is participating. The unit shall update such written  
40 outreach plan as necessary to improve the efficacy of its outreach  
41 efforts.

42 (B) The unit head and each service officer shall electronically track  
43 information relating to outreach conducted by the unit, including, but  
44 not limited to, the number of veterans or their spouses, eligible  
45 dependents or family members reached and any assistance to any such  
46 individual provided at or resulting from an event or opportunity  
47 described in subparagraph (A)(ii) of this subdivision.

48 (C) The unit shall utilize the notifications received from the  
49 administrator of each nursing home, hospital and assisted living  
50 facility in the state, pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this

51 section, to develop an annual schedule for each service officer to visit  
52 nursing homes, hospitals and assisted living facilities. The unit shall  
53 compile any information collected as a result of such visits and provide  
54 quarterly reports on such information to the Board of Trustees for the  
55 Department of Veterans' Affairs.

56 (D) The unit shall provide quarterly reports to the Board of Trustees  
57 for the Department of Veterans' Affairs on (i) concerns raised by  
58 veterans or their spouses, eligible dependents or family members,  
59 which concerns shall be summarized by type, frequency and  
60 resolution, (ii) petitions filed by veterans or their spouses, eligible  
61 dependents or family members received by the commissioner under  
62 section 27-102l(d)-54 of the regulations of Connecticut state agencies  
63 for the four preceding months, and (iii) copies of any such petitions.

64 (c) In addition to the powers and duties prescribed under section 4-  
65 8, the commissioner shall have the following powers and duties:

66 (1) To prepare studies and collect information concerning facilities  
67 and services available to members of the armed forces [ ] or veterans [  
68 their] or the spouses or eligible dependents of such members or  
69 veterans, including facilities and services for veterans who may have  
70 been exposed to a Vietnam herbicide during their periods of military  
71 service;

72 (2) To [conduct interviews in the nursing homes or hospitals  
73 throughout the state to determine the number of veterans admitted  
74 and ascertaining which benefits such veterans are currently receiving  
75 and are entitled to receive] require that the administrator of each  
76 nursing home, hospital and assisted living facility in the state  
77 electronically notify the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit twice  
78 annually of (A) any new resident in such nursing home, hospital or  
79 assisted living facility who is a veteran or a spouse, eligible dependent  
80 or family member of a veteran, and (B) any veterans' service or benefit  
81 such new resident receives and is entitled to receive. Each such  
82 nursing home, hospital or assisted living facility, in the course of  
83 notifying said unit, shall collect and maintain any data and shall not

84 release any individually identifiable health information without the  
85 consent of the resident to whom the information pertains, in  
86 accordance with the requirements of the federal Health Insurance  
87 Portability and Accountability Act of 1196 (P.L. 104-191) (HIPAA), as  
88 amended from time to time, or regulations adopted thereunder. As  
89 used in this subdivision, "new resident" means a resident of whom the  
90 veterans' advocacy and assistance unit has not been previously  
91 notified;

92 (3) To cooperate with service agencies and organizations  
93 throughout the state in disseminating and furnishing counsel and  
94 assistance of benefit to residents of this state who are or have been  
95 members of the armed forces [.] or their spouses or eligible  
96 dependents, which will indicate the availability of: (A) Educational  
97 training and retraining facilities; (B) health, medical, rehabilitation and  
98 housing services and facilities; (C) employment and reemployment  
99 services; (D) provisions of federal, state and local laws affording  
100 financial rights, privileges and benefits; and (E) other matters of  
101 similar nature;

102 (4) To assist veterans [.] and their spouses, [and] eligible dependents  
103 and family members in the preparation, presentation, proof and  
104 establishment of such claims, privileges, rights and other benefits  
105 accruing to them under federal, state and local laws;

106 (5) To cooperate with all national, state and local governmental and  
107 private agencies securing or offering services or any benefits to  
108 veterans [.] or their spouses or eligible dependents;

109 (6) To develop and prepare a long-range plan and mission statement  
110 for the Veterans' Home and the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit;

111 (7) To review all appeals made by veterans [.] or their spouses, [or]  
112 eligible dependents or family members and render the final decision  
113 thereon regarding the denial of admission to any program or the  
114 refusal to render any service or benefit which is administered by the  
115 Department of Veterans' Affairs, the discharge or transfer from any

116 such program or any disciplinary action taken while participating in  
117 any such program; and

118 (8) If the Veterans' Home closes or ceases to provide housing to  
119 veterans, to provide or arrange for housing to any veteran residing at  
120 the home or the health care facility within the home on the date of such  
121 closure or on the date the Veterans' Home ceases to provide housing to  
122 veterans.

123 Sec. 2. Section 27-135 of the general statutes is repealed and the  
124 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2016*):

125 (a) Any city or town, either separately or with one or more other  
126 cities and towns, may, by ordinance, establish a local veterans'  
127 advisory committee which shall have the responsibility of carrying out  
128 locally the duties and purposes of this section and, within their charter  
129 powers and as otherwise provided by law, may make available to such  
130 local committees the necessary funds to carry out their duties and  
131 responsibilities. The committee may (1) act as the coordinating agency  
132 in all matters concerning veterans and their dependents, coordinating  
133 the activities of public and private facilities concerned with veterans'  
134 reemployment, education, rehabilitation and adjustment to peacetime  
135 living; (2) cooperate with all national, state and local governmental and  
136 private agencies in securing services and benefits to which a veteran or  
137 his dependents may be entitled; (3) use the services and facilities of the  
138 veterans organizations so far as possible to carry out the purposes of  
139 this section; and (4) encourage and coordinate vocational training  
140 services for veterans.

141 (b) (1) Any city or town that [(1)] (A) has not established its own  
142 local veterans' advisory committee separate from one or more other  
143 cities or towns pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, and [(2)] (B)  
144 does not otherwise provide funding for a veterans' service officer shall  
145 designate a city or town employee to serve as a veterans' service  
146 contact person in such city or town. The Commissioner of Veterans'  
147 Affairs shall annually send to the chief executive officer of any such  
148 city or town an electronic notification of such chief executive officer's

149 duty to so designate a city or town employee in accordance with this  
150 subsection. Such chief executive officer shall, not later than thirty days  
151 after receipt of such notification, submit to the veterans' advocacy and  
152 assistance unit, as described in subsection (b) of section 27-102l, as  
153 amended by this act, the name and electronic mail address of the city  
154 or town employee so designated. As used in this subparagraph, "chief  
155 executive officer" means the officer described in section 7-193.

156 (2) Any city or town employee designated as a veterans' service  
157 contact person shall carry out the duties described in subsection (a) of  
158 this section and [may complete an annual] shall complete a training  
159 course conducted by the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit, as  
160 described in subdivision (2) of subsection (b) of section 27-102l, as  
161 amended by this act. Each veterans' service contact person so  
162 designated prior to July 1, 2016, shall complete such training course  
163 prior to January 1, 2017. Each veterans' service contact person so  
164 designated on or after July 1, 2016, shall complete such training course  
165 not later than one year after the date of such designation. Upon  
166 completion of such training course, a veterans' service contact person  
167 (A) may thereafter receive electronically any new or updated training  
168 information from the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit, and (B)  
169 shall not be required to complete any other such training course.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	October 1, 2016	27-102l(b) and (c)
Sec. 2	October 1, 2016	27-135

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Sec. 2	October 1, 2016	27-135